DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 086 197 IR 000 044

AUTHOR McAnany, Emile G.
TITLE Radio Clubs of Niger: September, 1972.
INSTITUTION Stanford Univ., Calif. Inst. for Communication Research.
PUB DATE Sep 72
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Agricultural Education; *Developing Nations; Educational Radio; Estimated Costs; Local Issues; Mass Media; *Nonformal Education; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; *Radio; Rural Areas
IDENTIFIERS Africa; *Niger; Radio Club Association of Niger

ABSTRACT

The Radio Club Association of Niger (ARCN) is a private agency and has been in operation for ten years under the guidance of the radio section of the Ministry of Information. The primary objective of this project is not the assimilation of information but the growth in awareness of their situation by local people. Most of the program therefore consists of feedback from interviews of local people about a certain problem. The ARCN faces problems such as finance, the prospective competition with more glamourous media such as TV and satellites, and the tendency of local bureaucrats to look toward the interests of other bureaucrats rather than the needs of the village. There has been no formal evaluation of results that precisely answers the question of cost effectiveness, but there is a large amount of feedback from people over the past decade that provides a rich qualitative picture of the program's impact. (CH)

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RADIO CLUBS OF NIGER: September, 1972 by Emile G. McAnany

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Niger: area: 489,000 sq. miles[1]
population: 3,848,000
languages: Hausa (43%), Songhai [includes Djerma] (18%), Pulaar, Tamashek, Arab, French
educational language: French

Media situation:

Television: A 50KW transmitter at Niamey can reach only villages along the Niger River to the northwest for about 40 miles. Television programs are made and aired exclusively for the pilot schools in this area. There is no other programming. The first pilot group of 800 students graduated from Tele-Niger schools in June after five years of television instruction. Some 500 took the secondary entrance exam; about 160 entered secondary in October, 1972 (the 32% success rate in passing the entrance exam was slightly better than applicants from regular primary schools). Programs for first grade, with a few remakes, will begin again in the same pilot villages in October, 1972. Tele-Niger is financed by the French government to continue operations at least another year. Members of the project are waiting to see if a declaration by Niger's President Hamani Diori for universal but nonformal education last month will affect Tele-Niger's future orientation.

Radio: The national radio system has four transmitters (three regular and one standby). One for the western part of the country (30KW), broadcasting in Djerma and French; one for the Eastern region (4KW) in Hausa and French; and one for Niamey (1KW) in French for the local elite population. There are some broadcasts in Pulaar and

1. Source: BREDA-STAT, Selected Statistical Data on 35 Countries of Sub-Sahara Africa. Dakar: UNESCO Reg. Off., 1971.

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Tamashek on the East and West stations.

Informational/educational programs:

1. Health: "Chronique sanitaire" is a 30-minute weekly program in Djerma and French for nurses and other health workers;

2. Women: "Chronique de la femme" is a 30-minute weekly program in Djerma and French for women in the home;

3. Education: "Magazine des maitres Nigeriens" has two programs a week in French, one for preschool and one for primary teachers.

Radio Club programs:

One 30-45 minute program plus a repeat each week from November to June in Djerma and Hausa with a few specially made programs for the nomadic people in Tamashek.

Status of Radio Clubs: October, 1972

The following are notes that combine information from interviews with people (Appendix A) during a four-day visit September 29-October 2 and from recent written documents (see Appendix B). This is a report on what the clubs are currently doing with some estimate of how they might contribute to the case study chapter on the lower cost alternatives to television.

The Radio Club Association of Niger (ARCN) has been in operation for ten years. In a brief assessment of the project in 1966 (Lefranc, 1967), a UNESCO consultant summed up the problems and promises of the Radio Clubs. Six years later many of these problems still continue and many of the promises remain unfulfilled, and yet the project remains alive after a decade of operation. We must ask whether this is a case of bureaucratic stagnation or whether continued life means that unlike many other media

projects that have since disappeared, the Radio Clubs have an internal vitality for Niger and a lesson for others. An examination of the goals, structure, and operation of the clubs seems to suggest that they have survived because they operate on some basic principles of communication that most other mass media projects might benefit from.

Objectives: The objectives as defined by ARCN are:

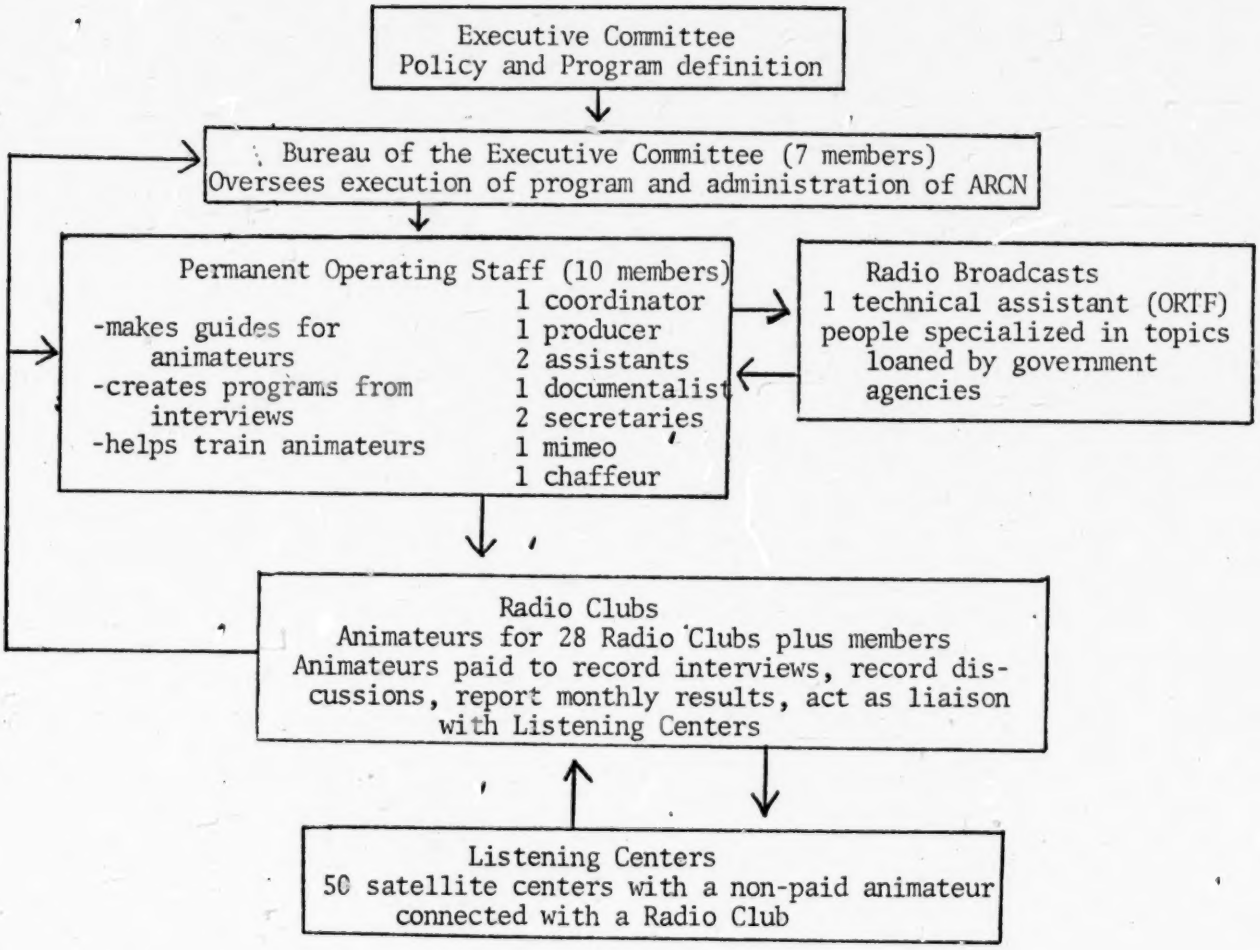
1. to foster an awareness in the rural masses of national development plans in terms of local problems through radio programs and discussion;
2. to create a dialogue between government and people that makes people aware of national development plans and the government aware of rural people's reaction to them; ultimately for greater national unity.

Although as stated such objectives sound familiar to those who have read plans for national media systems in developing countries, we should note several things that distinguish this project from others. First, the primary objective of the radio broadcasts and discussions is not the assimilation of information but the growth in awareness of their situation by the local people. In the usual project, it is the experts who decide what the problem is and seek to communicate the information necessary for its solution.

Another feature that distinguishes the Radio Club approach from that of most other projects is that feedback is the foundation and not a consequence of programming. Programs do not consist of information but rather of feedback from interviews of local people about a certain problem. Thus, the animateur or group leader of each club is asked to survey a certain number of people in his local area about a certain problem. The answers are tape recorded and sent to the production center in Niamey.

This kind of opinion survey forms the basis of a weekly program that will spark the village discussion of the problem to be focused on. A minimum of information is needed to focus the debate which is kept very close to the concrete situation of the group. The kind of philosophy behind such a development project sees the first stage of change not in giving out information "useful" for a solution that others have found but for local people to see the problem in their own context. Once the group recognizes the problem, it will then seek the necessary information for a solution. The order is first awareness of the problem by local people in their own situation, deciding on ways to solve the problem, then seeking the information relevant to the solution, and finally, solving the problem by common action.

Organization and Functioning: ARCN is a private agency working under the guidance of the radio section of the Ministry of Information. It operates in four offices in the National Audio-Visual Center of the Ministry of Education, along with a national literacy and an educational research project. The structure is as follows:[2]


Executive Committee
Policy and Program definition
Bureau of the Executive Committee (7 members)
Oversees execution of program and administration of ARCN
Permanent Operating Staff (10 members)
-makes guides for animateurs
-creates programs from interviews
-helps train animateurs
1 coordinator
1 producer
2 assistants
1 documentalist
2 secretaries
1 mimeo
1 chaffeur
Radio Broadcasts
1 technical assistant (ORTF)
people specialized in topics
loaned by government agencies
Radio Clubs
Animateurs for 28 Radio Clubs plus members
Animateurs paid to record interviews, record discussions, report monthly results, act as liaison with Listening Centers
Listening Centers
50 satellite centers with a non-paid animateur connected with a Radio Club

2. This is adapted with slight updating from Lefranc's chapter in New Educational Media in Action, vol. 3, p. 64.

Programming: Suggestions for themes of the six months of broadcasts from November to June come from government ministries and from animateurs at their year-end meeting. Themes common to both sources are automatically chosen; otherwise, the suggestions from the villages are given first consideration. Once themes are chosen, the production group works with various experts from the different ministries to create a series of interview questions to be sent the animateur. He then carries out a kind of opinion poll in his area, interviewing a small sample of farmers and the local extension agent if the topic happens to be on cotton production, or parents and the village health worker if it is vaccination. Most animateurs are asked to send by mail about five interviews to the production center. The following week the production team listens to the interviews from the two language groups in order to compile a 30-45 minute program for each group from the material that has arrived from most of the 28 paid animateurs. About two weeks after the original interviews on a Thursday evening, club members can listen to themselves and their neighbors talking about some pressing problem.[3] If the program arouses special interest or strong reaction, the recording of the discussion at the meeting is again collected by the production center from the animateurs and forms the basis of a monthly special program called "Carrefour." In addition, the animateur fills out written reports on each meeting and mails them to Niamey at the end of the month. At the year's end there is a meeting of animateurs and a final program summing up the year's work in the radio clubs is made and

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3. Program topics for the last four years are in Appendix C

and broadcast. Besides feedback from the animateurs, club members and other home listeners send in letters which are answered. Thus, for the Radio Clubs program content and feedback are one in the same and the audience is both speaker and listener.

Financing: The cost of this project was briefly studied in 1966 (Lefranc, 1967). At that time it was found that the budget had increased from $5,600 for 1962-63 to $77,000 in 1965-66 (when there were 42 clubs operating). This cost did not include the salaries of the French technical assistants (two persons holding key positions at the time). In the 42 clubs there were 700 members who had paid dues of $0.40 each, plus about an equal number of unpaid members and an estimated 100,000 home listeners.

Although no budget was given for the 1971-72 year when we visited Niger in September, some estimates of cost can be inferred. The same number of staff are working at the production center as there were working in 1966. There is only one French technical assistant. Programming and other services are about the same. There are 28 Radio Clubs and about 50 listening centers. Only the animateurs in the Radio Clubs are paid and fully equipped; their salaries run between $13 and $25 a month (or about $4,000 a year total if we estimate an average monthly salary of $20) and their equipment would represent an investment of about $250 apiece or $7,000 total (each is equipped with a good quality short wave radio, tape recorder, loud speaker system and amplifier, tapes and other small supplies). Although there is a $0.40 membership fee, this probably does not supply more than about $500 a year toward finances of the project.

Evaluating Results: There has been no formal evaluation of results that answers very precisely the question of cost-effectiveness. If the 1966 estimate of 100,000 listeners both in groups and at home is still correct and the budget was $80,000 for that year, then the cost per listener per program was only about 4 cents. But the problem is that such figures reveal nothing about impact.

If a study of impact were to be undertaken, several problems would face the evaluator. If the radio clubs presented straight informational programs, one might make a simple survey of new information gained from listening to the programs. Or if programs were conceived in the form of simply getting people to adopt innovative behavior, one might try to measure the number of innovations among listeners or in radio club villages. In a way such measures, although more precise, are less satisfactory in the radio club project since the main objective is not primarily to give information nor get adoption but to make people aware of the role they have in their community's development. Such awareness, although much talked about in development literature and in such methods as that of Paolo Freire, is very difficult to measure and evaluate.

On the other hand, if we do not possess much quantified data, there is a large amount of feedback from people over the past decade that provides a rich qualitative picture of the program's impact, including interviews on many topics, monthly written reports, letters, and a survey carried out every year on reactions to the radio club program. Lefranc looked at some of these data in 1966 and concluded that there was

evidence of attitudinal changes on the part of people in their willingness to participate as well as behavior changes in their community actions. A thorough study of such data sources would take a considerable effort and should probably be combined with some new field measures of attitude and community action.

Conclusions:

It may well be that a careful objective evaluation of a change in awareness by rural radio club listeners would not be worth the effort and money that such a study would cost. Instead, we might reflect briefly on the problems that the project has as well as its peculiar advantages that could be strengthened in local operation and perhaps shared by other countries if certain improvements could be made.

Two responses by local people responsible for the radio club project are instructive both about the problems and the promise of the project. When asked about the biggest problems facing the project, one person involved in it said that it needed money of course, but that the most worrisome thing was that the project had lost some of its initial drive and enthusiasm and furthermore, some people from the government and international agencies were pushing for solutions to rural problems with more glamourous media like television and satellites. This suggestion, he thought, went contrary to all radio club efforts to foster localness through a strong feedback mechanism and, if adopted, would lead to a more concentrated and technocratic media control in the cities. He also said that this tendency even manifested itself at a village level

where many successful efforts by people tend to be absorbed by local bureaucrats who are looking toward the interests of other bureaucrats in the capital and not the needs of the village.

The response from another man to a speculative question of what the radio clubs would do if they had all the money they really needed was very much related to these same problems. This person thought that a simple linear expansion of the clubs would soon defeat its purpose. After a maximum of about 50 clubs was reached, regional stations for local programming should be established in different population centers around the country. It was interesting to hear a project leader who did not automatically think of expanding his own power base by increasing the central agency but rather thought in terms of spreading that base to local centers.

This kind of thinking of how media can serve local needs with a strong base in local problems, culture, and language, as well as a good feedback system, seems to be the promise of the radio clubs of Niger and perhaps an explanation of why they still continue to operate after 10 years.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

People Interviewed

1. Ms. Clarice Albert, head, Monitor Feedback Section, Tele-Niger project.
2. Mr. El Hadj Badje Mamadou, director, Association de Radio Clubs du Niger.
3. Mr. Arthur Braunstein, AID Regional Office, Niamey.
4. Mr. M. Darkoyi, director, National Literacy Program.
5. Mr. Bernard Guimbaud, director, Tele-Niger project.
6. Mr. Herbert Hughes, Mr. James Hogan, Peace Corps--Niger.
7. Mr. Mousa Mamadou, director, Service de Promotion Humain.

Appendix B

Documents

ARCN. "Activites des Radio-Clubs de 1963 a 1966." ARCN office, 1966.

ARCN. "Campagne 1965-1966: Donnees statistiques." ARCN office, 1966.

ARCN. "Compte rendue de la reunion de l'assemblee general de l'ARCN." ARCN office, 1966.

ARCN. "Enquete finale 1966." ARCN. office, 1966.

El Hadj Badje Mamadou and J. J. Robert. "Dix ans d'animation radiophonique en milieu rural." Association des Radio-Clubs du Niger, 1972.

BREDA-STAT. Selected Statistical Data on 35 Countries of Sub-Sahara Africa. Dakar: UNESCO Regional Office, 1971.

Robert Lefranc. "Radio Clubs in Niger," chapter in New Educational Media in Action: Case Studies for Planners. Paris: UNESCO/IIEP, 1967, vol. 3.